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ABSTRACT

This paper develops the thesis that high morale among older people; i.e., a state of cheerfulness, confidence, and zeal; is achieved through intellectual, social and physical involvement in experiences which are meaningful because they are personally satisfying and socially relevant. It is assumed without further elaboration that high morale is the major goal all gerontologists seek to achieve. The major premise upon which the thesis rests is that the criteria for evaluating the personal and societal consequences of involvement are rooted in the value system of prevailing culture. A corollary to this premise postulated that such value systems are capable of modification in the presence of identifiable, manipulatable forces. Except for a brief preview of major value determinants affecting older people in our contemporary culture, the major thrust of this paper is devoted to the formulation of operational concepts which, hopefully, will prove useful to "geronto-minsters" and "geronto-leaders" in the formulation of strategies necessary to achieve high morale among the people they serve. (Author)

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CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR THE AGING

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I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to develop the thesis that high morale among older people, i.e, a state of cheerfulness, confidence, and zeal, is achieved through involvement: intellectually, socially, and physically, in experiences which are meaningful because they are personally satisfying and socially relevant. It is assumed without further elaboration that high morale is the major goal all gerontologists seek to achieve.

The major premise upon which the thesis rests is that the criteria for evaluating the personal and societal consequences of involvement are rooted in the value system of the prevailing culture. A corollary to this premise postulates that such value systems are capable of modification in the presence of identifiable, manipulatable forces.

Except for a quick preview of major value determinats affecting older people in our contemporary culture the major thrust of this paper will be devoted to the formulation of operational concepts which, hopefully, will be useful to "geronto-ministers" and geronto-leaders" in the formulation of strategies necessary to achieve high morale among the people whom they serve.

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1. This paper was prepared for The Advanced Seminar on Aging, New England Center for Continuing Education, University of Rhode Island-May 5, 1970.

II. THE SITUATION

So much has been written about the nature of our culture, particularly in reference to the forces with which older people must compete, that scant attention will be given here to the common items which determine social values. We all know about our work-oriented culture; our youth-centered society, our devotion to materialism; the unrest among our youth with the "establishment;" our national enchantment with an automated technology; the disappearance of our primary groups as families deteriorate in the face of the pull of urbanism; the ascendance of peer-group power over our young in such moral judgments as sex and drugs; the age-grading of our society which removes people from most of the regular systems of ego and economic maintenance and leaves them in limbo without much hope for social repatriation.

The challenge facing gerontologists lies more in looking into the realm of relatively unexplored constellations of social forces than in analyzing the reasons for the status quo. For example, in a recent television interview Harlan Cleveland, President of the University of Hawaii, summed up a conversation on ethnology in words that can be adapted to gerontology. He said, in effect, that the status of a person is limited to the status accorded his group by the society in which he functions. Certain outstanding exceptions, e.g., a Paul Bunche, do not counteract the validity of his postulate. Here is the source of the problem facing gerontologists: if the status of older men and women is dictated by the way the larger society looks upon them, what can be done other than to accept it and be content to operate within the prescribed

sanctions and constraints. Fortunately, we do not have to accept the status quo even if changing it is hard and often unappreciated toil.

Gerontologists might become introspective as they prepare to pursue their tasks of modifying cultural practices and values. After acknowleding that there are two kinds of problems facing older persons: those they actually have and those the experts think they have,

Rosow offers these comments about us:

> The old age field attracts many dedicated practitioners who work directly with the aged and, on their behalf, are deeply committed to social action and reform. Indeed, they regard gerontology almost as an ideological movement. Their intense involvement commonly magnifies older people's problems which then seem to loom larger than life and crowd most other issues from their perspective. In the process, their perception is often warped.
>
> Practitioners also oversimplify the problems of the aged... By concentrating on concrete material problems, practitioners can avoid thinking about subtle social needs that are less apparent and harder to manage, but equally compelling.[1]

To recapitulate the purpose of this paper, the problems of involving older adults in experiences which achieve and maintain a high level of morale require two presumptions: 1. A culture which accords high status to older adults, and 2. Practitioners knowledgeable in functioning within contemporary social constraints while they labor to affect changes in value systems and in operational procedures.

III. IMPLICATIONS

Being a professional in the field of aging would be a happy occupation, indeed, if the elders we deal with were venerated as they are -- or once were -- in some cultures. Alas, as Shanas[2] says, "In the social structure of the United States at the present time, to be old is to be no longer a member of adult society." She claims that the status accorded to old people is even lower than that allotted to children, and to make matters worse, she says, "Old people recognize this view of themselves and include it in their conceptions of themselves." This explains the reluctance of many older people to admit their age, their resentment to practically all current agency terms, e.g., Councils on Aging, Golden Age Clubs, Senior Citizens, and the like. For some older people an attempt to counteract this recognition of low status leads to bizarre behavior -- mini skirts on grandma, berets for grandpa, and frenetic activity when young people are around.

Once older people overcome the shock of being relegated to a status lower than that accorded to children, once they bring themselves to face up to the need for re-establishing their lives according to a new value system, once the power of group consciousness is recognized -- then we will be witnessing the emergence of a sub-culture in which new approaches to achieving high morale will be found by older people themselves and by those who serve them.

Older people are not completely without the support of a culture which is becoming more sensitive to their needs and potentials. It takes society a long time to become aware of so many old people in its midst. It takes

a long time, too, for people to realize that they are outliving their jobs by a decade or more. People now 70 went through their childhood when death of parents at an early age was not uncommon. They were taught, or learned by osmosis, that their own life span would end sometime in their fifties or before. There were few really old people around for them to emulate and revere. Without a pattern to follow those now old have had to formulate new designs for themselves. These will be left as models for the generations now growing old, for whom old age is a reasonable expectancy, and for which they are preparing themselves as society itself provides the sanctions for them to do so. Referring to Shanas again,[3] "The next generation of elders, possibly because of the struggles of these now old, will undoubtedly find a new status with being old in the United States."

But preparation for involvement cannot wait for the slow metamorphosis from the cocoon state of budding awareness to a full-blown social movement. Programs and procedures are required now for today's older people, by the practitioners who must use such knowledge as they now have. To accomplish the expedient of immediate needs it is proposed that gerontologists and practitioners alike turn their attention toward developing a viable sub-culture for older people.

Complex societies, according to Broom & Selznick,[4] "contain not one homogeneous culture but a multitude of...subcultures with which people identify and from which they derive distinctive values and norms." Sub-cultures can be distinguished by such forms as language, clothing, gesture,

etiquette, and, in our instance, by age. They develop, according to Rose and Peterson[5], when two possible sets of circumstances are present: 1. The members have a positive affinity for each other because of long-standing friendship, common backgrounds and interests, common problems and concerns, and the gains to be had from each other; and 2. The members are excluded from interaction in significant ways with other groups in the population. Shanas[6] contributes this to an understanding of the sub-culture of old people when, after enumerating some of the many roles older people play: parents, grandparents, husbands, wives, workers and pensioners, she writes, "There is one social role, however, which all older persons share. This is the role of the elder, a role which is basic and meaningful for older people..."

In an elderly sub-culture the aging person is encouraged to develop a life style tailored to his own concept of self as an individual and his concept of role in "his" own social system. He no longer needs to feel guilty because he is a non-producer in the world of work; he need not compare himself on any measure--looks, style, wealth, etc.,--with those of middle age or younger. In a sense he becomes a homesteader in a new social world -- his own -- where most of his friends are of his own experiental background. The values by which he judges himself, and is judged by society, are compatible with his current aspirations, limitations, and motivations. Among his own peer group he has become an important person because his talents, personality, and identity, are recognized and appreciated. He has less need for all of society because so much of it is no longer necessary to his world.[7] And yet, freed from trying

to regress to the conditions of his younger years he is in a position to look objectively upon those who are following him and their struggle to keep up with the burdens imposed by "their" culture. Because he is now a full-blown elder citizen busy with his own affairs, and revelling in the doing of them, he presents an image of life fulfillment which is the envy of those who still must work.

Gerontologists and practitioners who base their decisions and procedures upon the concepts of an aging sub-culture have at their command a growing body of knowledge based upon research. A brief resume of a few pretty well documented concepts are presented in support of this affirmation.

1. Rose and Peterson[8] believe that aging is changing from a demographic category to a sociological group with both individuals becoming self-conscious of their status and groups becoming aware of the potential of their collective power. The recently organized National Council of Senior[9] Citizens claim, and with justification, that its membership of several million influenced Congress to vote favorably for Medicare and the Older Americans Act of 1965. In the pursuit of these goals they were joined by the multi-million membership of the American Association of Retired Persons and the National Retired Teachers Association.[10] The Kentucky Association of Older Persons[11] was successful in influencing the 1970 session of the state legislature to remove the

five percent sales tax on prescription drugs and medical appliances. It is strongly suspected that many school and public bond issues are defeated by older people whose vote does not reflect their objection to the proposals as much as their fear of higher taxes.

2. Videbeck and Knox,[12] of the Continuing Education Center at the University of Nebraska, studied the participation patterns of people who were active and others who were inactive in a variety of typical activities: church, voluntary associations, attending public meetings, reading magazines or books, and political participation. They concluded that age is a less important variable in predicting participation patterns than are life statuses which characterize a person's stage in the life cycle.

3. C. Terence Pihlbald[13] and Robert L. McNamara studied the social adjustments in three small towns in the states of Iowa, Missouri, and Nebraska. Their Social Adjustment Scale, modified from the earlier work of Havinghurst and Cavan, can be used in many situations. They found that in the towns they studied "older people are enmeshed in a network of close and intimate personal relations and, contrary to the argument of some writers, do not feel themselves isolated or alientated from the community in most cases." Where high status is accorded older people chronological

age is of less significance than a youthful concept of self, good health, and adequate income.

4. Rosow[14] launches his study, The Social Integration of Older People, from the premise that their most significant problems are intrinsically social, that the basic issue is social integration and that in this there are two different referents which must be identified. The first is the total social system, i.e., the "articulation of various institutions and sub-systems with one-another-the network of linkages, reciprocal relations, and functional connections between structures." The second is the perspectives of the individual members. He says, "Integration then concerns how a person is tied into the web of belief and action in his society."

5. While not strictly a research paper, the thoughtful remarks of Irving Webber[15] are germane to our tas k of understanding involvement and how it is achieved. He noted, on the basis of a 1959 study by Wann & Woodward that one in every 41 persons over 60 was attending an organized class or instructional group. Then, he continued, that this number was smaller than it could be because of barriers to continuing education. He blames these on the social and cultural factors and notes, as others have, that old people are expected to conform to roles imposed upon them by a society which generates roles only for the young, the producers of marketable

goods and service. He put his finger on one of the problems of gerontologists and practitioners when he notes that, "The role of old persons can be described better in terms of the negative -- more in terms of what the elders may not do with social approval than what they should do."

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The major contribution of the thesis of achieving high morale in the years of retirement through involvement: intellectually, socially, and physically -- is that this can best be accomplished in a society which accepts old people as an integral component of its entire system of beliefs and institutions and permits them to move in a world that is largely their own, while, at the same time, remaining in contact with the tossing, churning, changing social sea that constantly flows about them.

James Allen,[16] Commissioner of Education, Department of Health, Welfare and Education, speaks of this "Third Dimension of Education" as a public policy supporting continuing education throughout a lifetime. This is a recognition of the fact noted by Linden[17] that human energies cannot be suppressed -- to try to do so causes great harm to people -- to society. Commissioner Allen may not succeed in bringing about the realization of his dream for a National Center for Lifelong Learning, but the fact that so high a figure in the educational world suggested it supports our view that adult education -- including education for older people -- is becoming a social reality.

In view of the thesis of achieving high morale through involvement in experiences that are personally satisfying and socially relevant, these observations seem pertinent.

1. A sub-culture of aging is emerging and it behooves gerontologists and practitioners alike to hasten its development. To this end, their energies and talents need to be directed more to social engineering and less to programming within the framework of the status quo.
2. Older people are changing as their self-consciousness grows and they develop social groupness rather than remain merely a statistical category. This is producing a situation in which demands for a wide variety of quality programs and services will grow beyond limitations now imposed by a society little concerned with older people.
3. The heightened educational level possessed by those now coming into full age will result in a greater demand for programs of all kinds, especially those of increasing intellectual and artistic complexity.
4. The aging sub-culture will present visible models of method and content, which new generations of oldsters-to-be can evaluate, modify, and adapt, in terms of their own expectations.

5. Given inspired leadership that is supported by a body of knowledge based upon science and research, and a cadre of people who are dedicated to maximizing life in old age, then a profession of gerontology will emerge.

6. Once older people realize the power that comes from the wisdom of their years, once they gain the confidence of support by their peers, once their love of country above self coalesces, then we will witness the emergence of a force so powerful that many of the tinsel troubles of today will be replaced by actions and activities more in keeping with the highest hopes of all mankind.[7] It is said that there is no denying an idea whose time has come. The idea of a leadership of elders, aided and abetted by geronto-ministers and geronto-leaders is at the dawning.